



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY

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STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS FOR PLACES OF ASSEMBLY

Places of Assembly

NH RSA 155:17-39 governs the requirements places of assembly in New Hampshire. The statute defines a "place of assembly" as a "room or space in which provision is made for the congregation of 100 or more persons for religious, recreational, educational, political, social or amusement purposes or for the consumption of food or drink".¹ Any tent that is occupied by 50 or more people is also defined as a place of assembly.

Any person who owns or operates a place of assembly must obtain a place of assembly permit from the local licensing authority, which is defined as the "fire chief, the firewards or engineers, if any, otherwise the selectmen of the town or the commissioners of village districts as the case may be."² The permit is valid for one year and is revocable for cause. The statute prohibits the charging of a fee for the permit. In considering whether to issue a permit, the local authority is authorized to require building plans that show the type of construction, exits, aisles and seating arrangements and details of decorations. The local licensing agency is required to inspect, or cause to be inspected, each place of assembly at least twice per year. If unsafe conditions are found, written orders for immediate correction must be issued.³ to the owner or operator of the facility. All law enforcement officers in the state are authorized to prosecute violations of RSA 155. Violations of RSA 155:17-39 are a misdemeanor for a natural person, or a felony if any other person.⁴

The specific requirements for places of assembly can be found in Chapter 12 (New Assembly Occupancies) and Chapter 13 (Existing Places of Assembly) of the NFPA 101 *Life Safety Code*®, 2000 edition, which has been adopted as part of the New Hampshire State Fire Code. The *Life Safety Code* establishes the criteria for occupant load calculations, exit widths, travel distances, exit signs, emergency lights, fire alarm, detection and suppression systems, door swing, panic hardware, interior finish,

¹ NH RSA 155:17, I

² NH RSA 155:17, II

³ NH RSA 155:34

⁴ NH RSA 155:39

decorations, crowd managers, and all other requirements relative to means of egress. The NFPA *Fire Prevention Code*, 2000 edition (also adopted in the State Fire Code), establishes the requirements for the on-going maintenance and operation of places of assembly.

The statute authorizes the licensing authority to modify the code provisions in existing places of assembly that might require structural changes, but only if adequate safety is maintained and a "permanent record is kept of such modifications and the reasons therefor".⁵

When inspecting of a place of assembly, particular attention should be paid to the following: maintenance of aisles, prevention of overcrowding, the use of decorations, the proper operation and maintenance of exits, and the maintenance and testing of fire extinguishers, fire alarm, detection, and suppression systems, exit signs, and emergency lights. Inspectors should insist that the management of the facility regularly train their staff on proper emergency procedures, including how to direct patrons to alternate exits. The facility operator is required to know at all times that the facility has not exceeded the authorized occupant load.

Local fire chiefs may obtain Place of Assembly Permit forms at no charge by contacting the State Fire Marshal's Office, 603-271-3294.

⁵ NH RSA 155:18